DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 074 SO 006 217

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TITLE Interdisciplinary Programs in International Studies.
PUB DATE 72
NOTE 5p.; Paper delivered at the 1972 meeting of the International Studies Association, Dallas, Texas

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Area Studies; College Curriculum; Cooperating Teachers; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Problems; Departmental Teaching Plans; *Educational Innovation; Intellectual Disciplines; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *International Education; Interprofessional Relationship; Program Descriptions; Success Factors; Teacher Attitudes; Undergraduate Study; Universities

ABSTRACT

Problems of an interdisciplinary program in university environments where traditional departments have top-billing are the focus of this paper. General conditions that exert a drag and positive factors facilitating the development and implementation of an interdisciplinary international studies program are outlined. The status of undergraduate international studies at Ohio State University is reviewed, noting the program's origins and organization. The emphasis of the paper is on the problems of the Center for Undergraduate International Studies. These problems generally result from the attitudes of other departments and faculty towards international studies, the concerns in offering area courses, and the development of the international studies major. (KSM)

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ED 083074

Interdisciplinary Programs in International Studies

(Problems of an interdisciplinary program in university environments where traditional departments have top-billing).

I. General conditions that exert a drag upon the development of interdisciplinary programs in international studies.

1. Inertia of traditional, academic, bureaucratic organization in response to innovative demands.

2. Resistance of departments to ~~inter-departments to~~ inter-departmental arrangements that threaten vested interests.

3. Traditional myopia of the specialist in viewing his own area or his particular disciplinary training as independent of, and superior to, any others.

II. Positive factors facilitating the implementation of international studies programs:

1. An increasing awareness among members of the academic community of the growing interdependence of the world and the emergence of new issues whose solutions must be sought by interdisciplinary, cooperative effort.

In this connection it is worthwhile quoting James N. Rosenau's recent report, International Studies and the Social Sciences, for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (June 1971):

"The new issues of the 1970's---the very issues that have brought on the economic, urban, and ecological crises--span the disciplines and work on them must perforce be interdisciplinary. And this means interdisciplinary not only among the social sciences, but among all the sciences, biological and physical as well as social."

And while Professor Rosenau added that, "Rightly or wrongly, this spanning of the fields tends to be seen by some of the purists in the social sciences as threatening, as undermining the appropriate structure of disciplined inquiry, and thus as but one more reason to be distressed about the professional state of things," he countered the negativism of this approach with the following: "the malaise stemming from a sense that the world's mounting interdependence is rendering disciplinary lines obsolete can be seized as an opportunity to start afresh on the old question of how to achieve meaningful interdisciplinary inquiry."

2. A general awareness among educators that in our shrinking world that has made us all residents of a global village, the educated man can no longer remain parochial, but must acquire knowledge of other parts of the world than his own.

3. A further point related to those above suggests that a multidisciplinary study of world cultures is needed as an essential part of the college graduate's basic education. Thus, in answer to the question of what kind

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of international education is most appropriate for the university graduate, some current thinking strongly favors the viewpoint of Jerome Bruner: "We teach a subject not to produce little living libraries on that subject, but rather to get a student to think mathematically for himself, to consider matters as a historian does, to take part in the process of knowledge-getting. Knowing is a process, not a product." In helping the student to learn about international affairs and foreign cultures, therefore, the interdisciplinary approach is valuable beyond its substantive content in providing the university graduate with an effective method of grasping the complexities of world affairs.

4. Finally, the "coming of age" of the area programs in American universities--particularly in the large ones like Ohio State University--and the growing sophistication of comparative methods of studying the world's economic, political, and social systems produce a richness of resources in the many disparate departments that create pressures of their own for coordination into meaningful programs.

III. The Status of Undergraduate International Studies at OSU.

1. Origins: In September 1971, a Center for Undergraduate International Studies was established at OSU, combining two programs which had been growing and maturing for about a decade. The first operation concerned students majoring in International Studies (as distinct from International Relations) within the Political Science Department. It offered an interdisciplinary core of courses in anthropology, history, economics, and political science, in addition to which the student could complete the required number of credit hours for his major by selecting courses with an international aspect and focused upon a particular issue or geographic division. The second operation, begun on the basis of OSU's extremely rich resources in Slavic studies, was the creation of an area course, "Introduction to the Soviet Union," an interdepartmental survey of the land, people and social institutions of the Soviet Union. This course is now a decade old, and in recent years has served as the prototype for the development of four new area courses: in Latin America, East Asia, the modern Middle East, and Africa.

2. Organization: The Center for Undergraduate International Studies at OSU is attached to the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Although offering the area courses noted above and one senior seminar for International Studies majors, it has no faculty; its part-time director is a member of the Political Science Department. The center does, however, have a small budget, from the Office of International Programs within the Office of Academic Affairs of the University, and this money is being used to supplement its requests for departmental cooperation in supplying the necessary faculty for course work and advising.

IV. Problems of the Center for Undergraduate International Studies at Ohio State University.

Inertia and resistance of departments to interdepartmental arrangements that threaten vested interests have a varied impact. Currently, our programs operate in the interstices between regular departmental chains of command and responsibility. We have some budgetary means of buying cooperation, and for most purposes this arrangement has been satisfactory, although an occasional academic decision has admittedly been dictated by lack of funds. But the general problem as stated

above needs to be qualified in a number of ways.

1. Eagerness of some departments to participate. Some department heads, perhaps motivated by the kind of thinking about the necessity for interdisciplinary cooperation expressed by Rosenau (p. 1 above), have shown an eagerness not only to cooperate but to loan their personnel to our program with some financial support from their departmental budgets, and without any prospect of direct returns on their investment. Other departments have a clearer interest in cooperating. For example, foreign language departments, today under attack by students and college curricular committees and in danger of losing their favored position as basic requirements for the Bachelor Degree in Arts and Sciences, can reasonably be expected to support activities that attract student interest to foreign area studies.

2. Tendency of some departments and faculty to view international studies as "esoteric." Academicians whose training has focussed upon U.S. problems or case studies or upon areas of study completely unrelated to empirical world affairs tend to drag their feet in any proposed cooperative effort. Many departments tend to split down the middle on the question of American-orientation versus international-orientation, and the impact of this upon our international studies program varies.

   Such departments are slow to add the area-oriented scholars trained in the department's respective discipline and needed to enrich our course offerings. On the other hand, aspiring area specialists do not always make an adequate effort to master the increasingly demanding techniques of their respective disciplines, but often continue to concentrate too closely upon acquiring only the substantive knowledge concerned with their foreign area. Increased competency on the part of our area specialists in the methodology of their disciplines is necessary to ensure the greater success of our programs of international studies in the future and to help bridge the present communication gap between area specialists and discipline generalists.

   Another problem is the attitude of parochially-oriented faculty toward the expansion of our program. For example, in the present university-wide examination of basic education requirements, our area courses recently faced opposition on the college (of Social and Behavioral Sciences) curricular committee as being inappropriate to fulfill a student's basic education needs. This opposition was effectively countered only after detailed reference to the earlier recommendations of an all-university advisory committee: "A Report and Recommendation from the Committee on Basic Education," (mimeograph, Ohio State University, March 22, 1967). This report had recommended in fact, that all undergraduates be exposed to some kind of international study:

   "The role of the United States in the present world means that some familiarity with another culture is a highly desirable feature of a student's education. We would encourage students to develop programs of courses having to do with another culture in satisfaction of their basic education requirements. The Associate Dean of Faculties should be encouraged to work with colleges and departments in developing whatever additional courses may be desirable.... Certainly, substantial work in courses having to do with another culture ought to be acceptable in whole or in part as meeting the basic education requirement (p. 14)."

The present area courses in international studies at OSU are partly a result of this 1967 recommendation.

3. Specific problems of the area courses. Compensation for participants has been a problem. For nine years the lecturers in our Russian area course (the pilot course) donated their services, and for the past three years this course has been offered three times each year. At one point a formula was proposed whereby each lecturer who had delivered a total of 25 to 30 lectures might, with the department's cooperation, receive released time from one departmental course as compensation. In other words, according to this formula the department was to be asked to subsidize our international studies course offerings. Understandably few department heads were eager to do this, having their own missions to perform and to pay for. Our current solution is to offer each participating lecturer a token payment of $25.00 per lecture. The course coordinator alone receives credit for teaching one course, and ad hoc arrangements are worked out with his department head to provide some compensation for his services (either 1/6 of his annual salary or a nearly equivalent amount in specials money to the department for assistants to replace him). It has become clear that unless we can pay our way with the departments, the long life and quality of our courses are in jeopardy, for although many professors are willing to donate their time to a one-shot innovative effort, they cannot be expected to continue cheerfully to do so, year after year.

Academic problem of integrating multiple approaches in the interdisciplinary course. This is a very real problem for the course coordinator and calls for careful and imaginative planning on his part. The multi-nation approach of most area courses adds to the difficulty of integrating the material presented. One helpful device is to put various lecturers in charge of coordinating the course during different quarters. In this way these lecturers become acutely aware of the problem of integration and attempt to shape their own offering accordingly.

4. Specific problems of the international studies majors. These problems relate to the content of the major programs and the question of the value of this major for the graduating student. The programs drawn up for the major include two broad approaches to contemporary world affairs (a study of international relations and a comparative study of developing nations) and four area concentrations (Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Africa, East Asia, and Latin America, with the Middle East and Western Europe soon to be added). Each track has an interdisciplinary "core" of required courses plus a selected list of courses carefully related to the theme or regional focus, from which the student may fill out his major. These programs have been developed and approved by the center's academic advisory committee with the aim of achieving a high level of course requirements and a well-structured program and providing appropriate methodological training in the most relevant social sciences. In addition, relevant quantitative or advanced foreign language training is required.

The question of how well our training prepares the student for opportunities upon graduation is a very real one. Regarding the students who intend to continue into graduate school, objections have been raised that departments frequently require undergraduate concentrations in one discipline, although this seems to be less true today than in the past. Criticisms have also been raised that some of our area tracks are too highly specialized for a general liberal arts education. Our area specialists counter that preparation for graduate training in their increasingly competitive fields requires this kind of specialization on the part of the undergraduate.

The broader, contemporary world affairs tracks presumably offer our students a reasonable option for those (the vast majority) who do not intend to become future professional area specialists.

In conclusion, and to end upon a positive note, I should emphasize that the problems of our international studies program have been greatly eased by the considerable enthusiasm of many faculty and administrators. These scholars are convinced of the genuine need for greater awareness of our global environment on the part of our students and the growing necessity to solve problems across national boundaries with multiple techniques. Thus they welcome our interdisciplinary cooperation as an honest effort to move in the right direction.